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ABSTRACT

The period immediately following the second World War is important for the history of the preparation of teaching assistants in this country because English instruction changed dramatically due to the enactment of the G. I. Bill in 1944. However, the long-term effect of the Bill on curriculum and pedagogy has not been documented. The G. I. Bill was instituted to make demobilization go smoothly by funding a college education for war veterans. From 1944 through 1954 over 50% of all veterans took advantage of these benefits, swelling enrollments dramatically. Major adjustments to instruction were made during the 1946-1947 year, when the biggest wave of veterans returned. Professors were hurriedly hired and provided with standard curricula. The students were distinguished by their maturity, achievement, and especially, their massive numbers. The freshman composition course, under severe attack from critics, covered the basic triad of writing themes, reading literary selections, and studying a writing handbook. Typically, new teaching assistants were given little and often no training. Numerous personal testimonies bear out this conclusion. Basically, beginning teachers drew on methods used on them over the years. During the 1950s, teacher training began to emerge as a serious discipline, focusing on rhetoric. However, such graduate methods courses emerged slowly. In short, the G. I. Bill generation of teachers, in the end, succeeded in revolutionizing the field of composition studies and the way beginning teachers are trained. (Contains 29 references.) (HB)

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Teaching the Teacher of Writing: Whence and Whither?

The period immediately before and after World War II is important to those of us interested in TA preparation because English courses changed dramatically with the enactment of the G. I. Bill of Rights of 1944. Officially known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, it subsidized two and a quarter million veterans on over 2000 campuses, nearly doubling prewar enrollment.

More than one historian has noted that "The dramatic, overnight impact on the facilities, faculty, curricula, heterogeneity, and atmosphere of campuses has drawn extensive historical attention," (Peeps, 524). However, none of the dozen or so book-length accounts I have read mention the effects that the Bill had on curriculum and pedagogy. It follows, then, that the immediate and long-term impact of the Bill on freshman composition and TA training has not been extensively documented. For instance, in our major journals of that period, English Journal, College English, and after 1950, CCC there were fewer than a dozen anecdotal accounts of individuals' experiences with (and as) veterans in freshman composition and new teachers of composition. Here, then, I want to report on my investigation of this period. First, I'll discuss some of the administrative and academic changes brought about by the war. Next, I will describe the freshman composition programs into which veterans were placed. Then, I will describe the veterans, undergraduate and graduate. Finally, I will describe how new TAs were trained when, as veterans returning to

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graduate programs, they taught freshman composition.

First, the G. I. Bill: Some historians of the G. I. Bill of 1944 point out that it was only an accident of national economics and politics that funds were set aside for education in the Bill. In 1943, one historian explains, "All signs . . . pointed to an economic crisis: the cessation of military contracts, the time-consuming job of retooling industries for civilian consumer production, the mass migration of war workers returning to their former locations, and the prospects of large numbers of demobilized servicemen [8 or 9 million in 1945 and early 1946] looking for employment" (quoted in "A B. A. for the G. I. . . . Why?" 515).

So--primarily for economic reasons--the government sought ways to make demobilization go smoothly by providing home loans, readjustment allowances, and educational benefits. Educational benefits were politically important, too, in helping to counter the unpopularity of the 1942 amendment to the Selective Service Act of 1940, which allowed the government to draft teenagers.

In 1942, then, when drastically low college enrollments were well-publicized, Roosevelt appointed a committee of educators to study how to compensate those whose education had been interrupted. Many groups of educators, along with the American Legion and state and Congressional committees, were involved in shaping the G. I. Bill. And, while all the groups held the federal government responsible for funding, they wanted to be sure that the government wouldn't establish too many restrictive guidelines (Mosch, 26).

There were, in fact, minimal guidelines for implementing the legislation. In The G. I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges, Keith Olson explains why: "Because Congress . . . regarded higher education as a tool or device to ward off a potential danger, it set or implied no objectives other than a vague desire to increase the number of college graduates and it gave no thought to the impact the act would have upon college education. Hence, any effect

the G. I. Bill had upon higher education was unintentional" (102).

But it was bound to have tremendous effects on higher education, since, from 1944 through 1954 over 50% of all G. I.'s took advantage of the benefits, about 20% of whom would probably have missed college without the aid (Adjustments, 310).

What happened in the colleges as they waited for demobilization? Because we were preparing students to be soldiers or to contribute in other ways to the war effort, special courses were added to the curriculum. To accommodate draft-age students and returning veterans, educational and vocational guidance programs were improved and expanded; entrance requirements were liberalized, admissions procedures speeded up, calendars rearranged to allow draftees to complete work before going overseas. The English Journal and College English reflected faculty preoccupation with the war effort in lead articles like "Poetry and the War," "The Shape of Postwar Literature," and "American Letters Between Wars."

During the war some high schools and colleges solved the problem of how to prepare students for war by dropping freshman composition to make room for more courses in defense related skills. Two hundred and twenty-five colleges, at the request of the government, took on the training of soldiers. As George Wykoff of Purdue explained, in most cases they followed an elaborate Army English program which included reading, writing, speaking, and listening (339). Some offered correspondence courses, and extension programs were expanded. Many colleges had in place remedial English courses for their inadequately prepared freshmen, but, as Gilbert Bond of Simmons College put it, "the influx of veterans into the universities certainly [underscored] several times the need for remedial English" (466).

But the major adjustments came during the 1946-1947 academic year when the biggest wave of veterans returned. Barracks, trailers, and tents became classrooms,

dormitories, and administrative buildings. High schools offered night classes. To give some sense of the scope of the transition, here is what happened in one region: In New York, Champlain College was created at the army post Fort Plattsburg; Mohawk College at Rhoads General Hospital; Sampson College at the Naval Training Center (Miller and Allen, 108-110). The teachers college and private engineering college in Potsdam, New York, along with their neighbor, St. Lawrence University, saw enrollment increases up to 170 percent from 1941 through 1946 (Olson 128). Everything moved quickly.

Professor Betty Cain, now retired from UC-San Diego, described to me in an interview her teaching situation in 1946, illustrating how one college dealt with the flood of veterans: With an M. A. from the University of Minnesota and a year's high school teaching experience, Betty heard that the University of Illinois was about to open a branch at the Old Navy Pier Building in Chicago to accommodate veterans. "If you had an M. A., you were hired--period," Betty recalled. "So there were all kinds of people teaching, doing their own things" in Navy training rooms and offices.

Twenty to 30 teachers were hired the first year by a former Evansville College professor who had been recruited to chair the new humanities division. The new faculty taught eight classes a year, following the curriculum of the University of Illinois: a developmental writing class, two freshman rhetoric courses, a sophomore advanced composition course, and an introduction to literature course. While there was no syllabus, the required text was Louise Rorabacher's Assignments in Exposition, a collection of readings that reflected the common view that "literary selections can serve two very useful ends: as models of form and as motivation through content" (393). Betty assigned themes, corrected them, discussed them in conferences, returned them, and moved on to the next paper assignment.

As for the veterans, Keith Olson characterizes them, both undergraduate and

graduate, in terms that are consistent with those of faculty who had them in their classes: "[They] distinguished themselves by their numbers, their maturity, and their achievement. ... Faculty and administrators, overcoming caution and even fear, hailed them collectively as the best college students ever. Undeniably, they differed more from the students they succeeded and preceded than has any generation in the history of American higher education" (42).

Reflecting upon the veterans who had filled classrooms in 1945, Edith E. Layer of Western Reserve wrote, "... [I]n 1945, when our classes began filling up with boys straight from months of fighting in the front lines and girls who had left the campus to wear the uniform of the WAC or the WAVE, we had the greatest challenge of our teaching experience. There was no problem of motivation; there was only the problem of helping them to say what they wanted to say more effectively. Sometimes they were disillusioned and cynical; sometimes they were pitifully inarticulate or stumbling in their efforts to communicate; but they were willing and eager learners, and even in the over-crowded classrooms most of them managed to do better than average work. They disagreed with accepted points of view, they were alert and alive, and they had a personal sense of values" (4-5).

What were the veterans' freshman composition courses like? In the years immediately before the war, freshman composition was, as it had been for decades, under attack. Freshman English, its critics said, was failing to produce improved writing skills. Oscar James Campbell, for instance, argued in a 1939 English Journal article that asking students to write when they had nothing to say developed in students' minds "a deep and often permanent fissure between thought and expression" (180). Writing should be taught, Campbell and others argued, in connection with subject-matter courses where the need to write is a real one, not a trumped-up one. Other critics of freshman composition contended

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that program goals were too complex, too ambitious. Teaching students to write should be the principal aim of freshman composition, not incidental goals like developing students' sensibilities or instilling in them desirable social habits and attitudes--this criticism, an attack on the progressive education movement (C. W. and W. A. Kerby-Miller, 626-27). A third criticism: students were required to write personal essays when they would never use that genre outside of their freshman composition class. Moreover, courses were criticized for not taking into account the whole process of preparing an essay, emphasizing instead only expression, style. Finally, teachers generally required students to deal with a dozen complex problems at once, rather than on one problem at a time (634).

In a 1945 College English article, "The 'Book-of-Readings' Problem," Louise E. Rorabacher of Purdue, whom I mentioned earlier in connection with Betty Cain's 1946 class, characterized freshman composition in this way: "The term 'English' in the modern college curriculum covers a multitude of activities, from philosophy to playshop; but the course required of entering freshmen has come to be recognized pretty generally as a service course in composition. As such, it usually include[s] three activities: the writing of themes, the study of a handbook, and the reading of selections" (393).

How were new teachers prepared to teach these classes? In the forties and early fifties, there were few published calls for graduate methods courses, although CCC, begun in 1950, did publish descriptions of optional, non-credit courses.

As part of my study, I interviewed Ross Winterowd of USC and William Irmscher, now retired from The University of Washington. In addition to having prepared legions of teaching assistants to teach composition, both got their advanced degrees through the G. I. Bill. From my reading and interviewing, I believe Professor Irmscher's preparation as a TA. to be fairly typical.

Having done an M. A. at Chicago, Irmscher arrived at Indiana University not knowing

very much about teaching assistantships. He told the department chair that, although he had the G. I. Bill, he also had a wife and child, so he would need some kind of work. "If you have something in the English Department, of course, I would prefer that rather than having to go out and do something else," he told the chair. "Here we were," Irmscher said, "already in the first week [of classes,] and the chair said, 'Well, I have one class of composition that's still unstaffed. Would you be interested in doing that?' and I said, 'Well, certainly.'" With the syllabus (really only grading standards and a list of the books) and the books, Irmscher began teaching. "I think I would have been quite lost, except for the fact that as an undergraduate I had done teacher preparation and a year of practice teaching, and then right before the war, I had taught seventh grade. . . . And I simply utilized whatever skills that I had to teach that class. But [my graduate preparation] wasn't any different from [the preparation of] those who had come in [without any teaching experience.] . . . At that time, they had absolutely nothing [to prepare new teachers]."

From my interviews with colleagues and a friend who began to teach as graduate students at a time when they were desperately needed, I heard similar accounts. In 1944, in a new apprenticeship program at Berkeley, my colleague Calvin Thayer taught four or five classes of whatever his mentor told him to teach and graded his mentor's papers. At Tulane in 1947, after Roland Swardson had finished his BA, he ran into the department chair who asked him what he was up to. When he said he would probably go home and work on a newspaper, the chair offered him a teaching assistantship on the spot. Swardson recalls that he had no set syllabus but was required to use Warnock, Perrin, Ward, and Platt's Using Good English. He was observed once and was required to attend occasional meetings about administrative matters. At the University of Connecticut in 1951, Lester Marks at first had weekly meetings in which TAs were assigned to lead discussions about, for example, how to teach X or how to grade papers. Later, TAs met biweekly to discuss textual matters,

assignments, teaching strategies, "whatever was thrown on the table for discussion." At Ohio State in 1946, Gratia Murphy was handed a syllabus, a text, a class roster for her composition class, and an office number. (Later, to teach introduction to literature, however, she was required to apprentice with a senior faculty member. But that's another story.)

In short, instructors relied on methods they vaguely recalled having been used on them six or ten years earlier. The participants of a 1959 CCCC workshop on training teachers bemoaned their TAs' lack of training, but they identified the ability "to conduct literary and linguistic research and know well American Literature, Modern English Grammar, History of the English Language" as essential to their preparation (31).

It is safe to say that the initiations into the profession that I have described are typical of the preparation of thousands of graduate students in the forties and fifties, and, indeed, the sixties. There were, however, some graduate methods courses offered at this time. In 1946, for instance, Charles Roberts of the University of Illinois introduced a one-credit course, "The Theory and Practice of English Composition."

In 1948 at the University of Washington, Betty Cain recalls, Porter Perrin offered a seminar on backgrounds for teaching composition, unique even by today's standards in that Perrin asked graduate students to work out the practical applications of the theories of language, psychology, rhetoric, and critical reading they were discussing in class.

The course that may be the model for the 1960s and 70s courses in which current rhetorical and pedagogical theories were introduced was Albert Kitzhaber's "Rhetorical Background of Written English." Offered first in 1950, the University of Kansas course--which, incidentally, Ross Winterowd took in 1954 and to which he attributes his initial interest in rhetoric--grew out of the need for experienced writing teachers, but the University wanted to help beginning teachers "form the same sort of professional attitude

toward the teaching of composition as they already [had] toward the teaching of literature" (196). New teachers met two hours biweekly for lectures on announced topics and to "work out some of the practical applications of the theoretical material presented in the lecture" (196). During the first semester, rhetorical traditions, British rhetoric of the 18th century, 19th century American tradition, psychology and rhetoric, linguistics and rhetoric, grammar and usage, punctuation, and paragraphs were covered. During the second semester, literary theory, English prose style, reading and grading compositions, subjects for composition, semantics and rhetoric, rhetoric and logic, English placement exams, and various types of composition courses around the country were the topics.

What is our legacy from this period, an era which Robert Connors says changed the face of English (52)? Certainly the relationship between faculty and student changed. How could it not, especially for those who had experiences like Roland Swardson had when he faced his first class as an assistant professor at the University of Cincinnati. He looked up from the podium to see in the front row the First Class Gunner's Mate under whom he had served in Officers' Candidate School. Certainly the veterans' teaching experiences taught them to attend to the connections between reading and writing, between speaking and writing. Witness the Communications Movement that was so strong in the fifties.

The veterans who had had to teach themselves how to teach were slow in putting into place graduate methods courses. At the Basic Issues Conference of 1958, for instance, participants agreed that "many graduate schools were training students as <u>scholars</u> only and then recommending them to the colleges as <u>teachers</u>" (Shugrue 90); they asked, "What preparation for college teaching should the PHD candidate receive?" Still, it was another 10 years before most universities saw that the preparation of new teachers needed to be integrated into their graduate programs. In the meantime, in 1964, while editor of <u>CCC</u>, Ken Macrorie wrote: "Ever since I entered graduate school in English in 1946, I have been called

to dark corners of corridors or asked to sit in faculty offices behind closed doors and listen to [graduate students recite] chapters from a book I would title Tales of Neglect and Sadism" (209). Those horror stories continued until the next wave of students flooded campuses., and open-door policies created the need for more teachers and for ways to prepare them.

But it was this GI Bill generation of teachers who, to quote Robert Connors again, "democratized the staid old English field. In literature they championed American literature and the New Criticism . . . and In composition their populist influence was even more powerful." Most important, however, was that "A notable group within this post-World War 11 generation . . . determined to study composition, analyze it, and try to do it as best it could be done" (52). And that has made all the difference.

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